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ABSTRACT

This research project used a conceptual framework to study television viewing as a process of communication rather than as a one way transfer of information from the set to the person. Children's own definitions of experience of television viewing/behavior were used to shape the direction and concerns of the project. As background to, and in support of, this project, a review of research on children and television is included. A three stage research design used a combination of methods to explore the relationship of children between the ages of 8-9 and 11-12 years with television. For Stage 1, 64 Australian school children were interviewed to determine their definitions of the television world and their television behavior. Stage 2 involved observations of 23 children at home watching television and doing other routine activities. In Stage 3, 486 school children were surveyed by questionnaire. Data collected were summarized under two headings: television viewing as children understand it, and social interaction during television viewing. It was concluded that: (1) adults need to be more aware of the dynamic relationship children have with television and its special significance to those who have little access to other kinds of leisure; (2) program content should do justice to their viewing abilities and curiosity; and (3) children must be given programs that deserve their enthusiasm. (33 references) (CGD)

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PATRICIA PALMER

THE SOCIAL NATURE OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING

Paper Presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference

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THE SOCIAL NATURE OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING

INTRODUCTION

A primary school teacher recently made a remark to me which helps to define what we are up against in research on children and television and in media education. As soon as I said the word 'television' to describe my field of research, he replied in a confiding tone, 'Nasty medium isn't it?'. Then he settled his class down to watch a video program about poetry.

The view that television is 'nasty', especially in the case of children, is such a persistent one that it bears closer scrutiny. There seem to be two notions about television which recur in the talk of those who take such a position. The first is that television is a 'thing'; an 'idiot box', a'boob tube', an 'electronic babysitter'. Marie Winn calls it two things at once in her book,'The Plug-in Drug' (1985). Television is both a machine and a sedative.

Reducing television to a 'thing' rather than a means of communication makes it simpler to criticize and condemn. No tricky shades of opinion over varieties of programs to get in the way.

The second notion, which rests on the first, is that TV has a controlling power over children. Opinions vary as to whether children are passive (Winn, 1985) or hyperactive (Emery & Emery, 1975) but they agree that TV is in charge.

The portrait of a powerful object which has children in its maw is the stuff of legends and calls out all our desires to protect children from harm. If television is such a creature, we must roundly condemn it or at the very least exercise strict control over its access to children. It is therefore not surprising to find that writing about children's television is full of calls for greater control;

by parents, governments, anybody but children themselves. Research usually supports and encourages these calls for control, by its uncritical acceptance of a definition of the child-television relationship which goes something like this: 'they watch the screen and passively soak in images, words and sounds hour after hour, as if in a dream' (Winn, 1985:194). Those studies which have directly challenged current definitions of the child-TV relationship (for example Noble, 1975; Feilitzen, Filipson & Schyller, 1977; Frazer, 1981; Rice & Wartella, 1981; Bryant & Anderson, 1983) don't seem to have made much of an impression on the prevailing 'nasty medium' attitude.

This new research project took a different tack from the beginning. First, it used a conceptual framework with which television viewing could be studied as a process of communication rather than a one way transfer of information or 'effects' from the set to the person. It was also decided that children's own definitions of the experience of television viewing should shape the direction and concerns of the research project.

This approach was based on the views of society described in the work of George Herbert Mead (1934) and others. It was further developed by Blumer, whose writing included a critique of mass media research. In this critique, Blumer exposed the assumptions of 'effects' research and set a new agenda for the study of mass communication. He typefied the usual approach to the study of mass media effects as follows:

'The student identifies the influence in the medium which he [sic] wishes to study, he identifies the people who are subject to this influence, and he seeks to ascertain the effects that result from the play of the given influence on the given universe of people' (Blumer, 1969:183)

His own description of mass media was at odds with the prevailing view.

'Like the content of conversation, the presentations made through mass media differ greatly in substance and manner and, further, are likely to evolve and change to meet newly developing conditions. Thus, to treat mass media as a single, homogeneous and constant factor is to ignore their real character.' (Blumer, 1969:186)

Media influence is further modified by the audience members themselves.

'Their interests, their forms of receptiveness, indifference, or opposition, their sophistication or naïveté, and their established schemes of definition set the way in which they initially receive the presentations' (Blumer, 1969:187-188)

It was Blumer who coined the name 'symbolic interactionism', the perspective on which the following research project was based. Researchers following him have studied communication processes within and between social groups, including television audiences. (Schmitt, 1972; Shibutani, 1972; Anderson, 1981)

Recent formulations of this perspective have emphasised the significance of social context and social structure in ongoing group interaction (see Strauss, 1978; Hall, 1980; Stryker, 1980), factors which have previously been ignored or underplayed because of Blumer's insistence on the 'intertwined, interacting, and transforming make-up of the communicative process' (Blumer, 1969:187)

Symbolic interactionism is one variant of a more general constructivist approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The specific framework of symbolic interactionism was preferred because of its existing research literature on children and television (Frazer, 1976; Reid, 1979). In addition, rsearchers using this perspective have developed new methods with which to study social groups (Lull,

1982). These methods usually combine observation of behaviour in social settings with exploration of the meaning these actions have for the participants.

In a review of research on children and television published during 1980, Wolf, Hexamer and Meyer underline the need for research methods which reflect the nature of the phenomena being studied. Their description of the communication process is also reminiscent of Blumer's critique. They state:

'If mediated communication is actually a dynamic and ongoing process which produces meanings for content that are being negotiated over time, such changes resulting from negotiated outcomes should not only be incorporated into and accounted for by research paradigms and perspectives, it should be incumbent upon our methods to do justice to the process that the paradigms are supposed to represent. Such a change will necessitate more inquiries of an exploratory nature, more phenomenological investigations like ethnographies and symbolic interactionist perspectives'. Later they add, 'In no area is such a movement more critical than children and television. Without such a movement, the 1980s will be a decade of limited hypotheses and findings being profusely generated but continually in search of a sufficient, satisfying and meaningful explanation.' (Wolf, Hexamer & Meyer, 1982:365,367)

RESEARCH METHODS

According to Denzin (1978), symbolic interactionists should study both the behaviour of social groups and the meanings which their actions hold for the participants. Those being studied are referred to as 'actors' rather than 'subjects' because their own purposeful activity is taken into account. The researcher's active, interpretive role is also acknowledged. For this reason, great care must be taken when entering the social worlds of others. Their own

view of what it is they are up to is part of what a researcher must consider in forming his or her own theory.

It is clear that a study of children and television which follows this method will seek out children's own ways of thinking about the experience of television viewing and relate these to their viewing behaviour. Because this has seldom been done, it was chosen as the beginning step in a three-stage research design, which used a combination of methods to explore children's relationship with television. The findings based on this new theoretical and methodological approach give a very different picture of children and television, and may herald a change in the way television is regarded in the education of children.

STAGE 1 INTERVIEWS

During September and October, 1982, sixty-four children were interviewed at four primary schools in different areas of Sydney, Australia. Two schools were state schools; two were private(Catholic) schools. Children were chosen from class lists to prevent teacher bias. There were equal numbers of boys and girls, and equal numbers from year three (8-9year olds) and year six (11-12year olds). Interviews were conducted one-to-one but in an attempt to minimize control of the talk by the adult, a conversational method was used, exploring the words and concepts which children introduced. An overall thematic guide was used which focussed on children's definitions of the television world, what they liked and disliked on TV and television's part in relation to friends, family and school.

Transcripts of the tapes (700 pages) were read and re-read to establish common themes and relationships between them.

STAGE 2 OBSERVATIONS

During October, November and December 1982, twenty-three children were observed at home watching TV and doing other routine activities. Boys and girls, 8-9year olds and 11-12 year olds were observed in equal numbers, except for 11-12 year old girls, of whom there were only five. Families were contacted using a variety of networks and methods. This was difficult, and the search for families continued through to the last weeks.

The observations were for a total of nine hours for each child, divided into three sessions of three hours in the aftenoon/evening period during one week. The observer (there were a total of four including an anthropologist) kept a continuing account of everything the child said and did during the nine hours except during dinner if the family ate together. (The observer did not eat dinner with the family). The account was written as an ongoing dramatic script in what came to be called 'diaries'. If the child watched television, a note was made at appropriate times of what was being shown.

Children were introduced to the observer as a person from the university who was interested in what they watched on television.They were asked to do the things they normally did, even if it was not watching TV. In most cases they paid little attention to the observer after the first few hours.

Observation data was supplemented by an interview with the mother, conducted before the observations began and a diary of before and after school activities filled in by the child for the three days of the observation. At the end of the observation period children also answered a very short questionnaire.

Observer's comments were sought during and after each observation, but were clearly marked and separated from the observation data. Meetings of observers

were held each week during the conduct of observations to enable feedback , clarification and comparability of methods. They were also necessary for morale. It was difficult to work in someone else's private space in a sustained way. In meetings, we could let off steam and still maintain the confidentiality of the co-operating families.

Analysis involved a lengthy process of reading diaries, summarizing viewing events then re-reading and developing categories of behaviour. These were listed and then tested in a review of the diaries.

STAGE 3 SURVEY

During July and August 1983, 486 children in fifteen schools in Sydney were surveyed by questionnaire. There were approximately the same number of boys (239) and girls (247), and of 8-9year olds (248) and 11-12year olds (238). Children were chosen at random using a slightly modified form of cluster sampling, so that the results could be generalizable to Sydney children in the two age groups. Children from all social classes and most ethnic groups were represented.

The questionnaire was mostly hand printed and was set out to look like an attractive school workbook. Some of the questions were composed of a series of pictures which had to be circled or crossed through. The pictures themselves were based on others drawn by children during the interviews. Usually, the survey was administered in groups of twelve children of the same age, and the researcher read every question and adjusted the pace for each group.

The completed forms were coded, punched and tabulated in standard ways.

The following discussion does not treat the three research stages separately but

integrates the findings into a single report. It is the work of the researcher in such a study to be 'builder and creator, piecing together many pieces of a complex puzzle into a coherent whole' (Jick, 1979:608).

TELEVISION VIEWING AS CHILDREN UNDERSTAND IT

A knowledge of children's ways of thinking about their television experience was to be the foundation of this research. The first two questions in the interviews showed that children's definition of television viewing was selective and based mainly on their own positive experiences of favourite programs which they viewed regularly. In response to the questions,'do you watch TV?' and 'what do you watch?' all but nine children immediately listed the names of specific programs. Only cartoons and movies, and for a few of the older children 'science fiction' and series, were ever mentioned as a group. Not one child included in their initial talk about TV those programs which they disliked or did not watch. Nor did they mention commercials, even though when they were questioned about them, they expressed very definite opinions.

Their selective definition of television viewing was also reflected in children's viewing behaviour. Children would often complain, 'nothing's on' when one of their regular favourites was not available, even though they left the TV on and might even watch another program.

In the following excerpt, Debbie's TV guide is not like the one in the newspaper but is a list of the programs she likes best:

Do you usually watch the same things every week?

Yeah...except for the movies

So you always know what's on television?

Yeah...mum says I've got me own TV guide in me brain'

The association of favourite programs with television viewing means that talk about television will usually evoke very positive feelings. Children's enjoyment of viewing certainly came through in the drawings they did during the interview of themselves watching TV. In these drawings there is a visual expression of the words 'fun' and 'excitement' which they used often to describe their reasons for liking particular TV shows. Children consistently drew themselves smiling as they watched TV and if the television screen faced out of the page, a scene from a favourite show would appear. Dramatic moments or family scenes with everyone smiling were common subjects.

The association of fun and excitement with television viewing is not often canvassed in adult discussion or in research. Children themselves are aware of the disparity between their own opinion and that of adults in general. When asked in the survey to rate the opinions of themself, their mother and their teacher, 59% of the children stated their opinion to be "TV is great'. By contrast, only 14% said this was their mother's opinion and 12% said this was their teacher's opinion. Children were most likely to attribute to adults the opinion, 'sometimes TV shows are good' (mothers 40% and teachers 45%).

Children's talk about TV in the interviews expressed their positive feelings about viewing; in words, pictures and even in the gestures and sounds they used to describe programs. They talked about their viewing as if they exercised freedom in the choice of programs, and were able to be involved one-to one.

Evidence from the survey did not support the impression that this was the usual social situation for children watching television. Only a small minority of children (7%) said they watched TV alone in the afternoon or in the evening to

nine o'clock (1%).

Both of these aspects of children's viewing were confirmed in the observation study. Here, children were seen trying to create a one-to-one relationship with the TV set whatever the physical or social surroundings.While this could not usually be managed for all of their TV viewing it was especially noticeable for the one or two shows with which children wanted to be most involved.

The most common way children contrived to be involved with TV was a physical one; they sat or lay down very close to the TV. The sense of cosy intimacy with TV was usually reflected in the physical appearance of the viewing area. Beanbags, cushions, blankets and comfortable lounges were the furniture of child TV viewing. Children usually sat in their familiar spot each day, using soft furnishings to get very comfortable and relaxed. Where the space was shared with siblings, attempts to modify surroundings or grab the best spot for viewing sometimes created conflict. In one family children were observed each day vying for a particular corner lounge suite then fighting over who had the most blanket.

Distance from the television set was sometimes an indication of how important a show was for children. One boy, Peter, was seen to adjust his distance from the TV set often over the three days' observation, depending on what was on and who else watched with him. On one occasion as he watched 'M.A.S.H.', his favourite program, he was frequently disturbed by the noise of his mother and younger siblings playing together on the same lounge. He gradually moved closer to the TV, turning up the volume each time, and became insensible of the family's activity. His mother apologized when she noticed him perched on the end of the lounge with the volume much louder than usual.

Although children want to be involved with some shows, they don't necessarily want to watch alone. When family members were disinterested or too noisy, pets were sometimes chosen as viewing companions. During the interviews children had surprised interviewers by naming pets as 'people' they watched TV with. Some even described the pet's viewing habits. Their presence was confirmed in the survey where just under half of the children (45%) said they watched TV with a pet. Of these, 16% watched with a dog, 22% with a cat and some with both. Birds, rabbits and even fish were named as viewing companions.

Seven of the twenty-three children in the observation study watched with cats or dogs. Sometimes they would play with them or feed them during program breaks but most often both would sit in close physical contact. When children wanted to watch TV olosely, the pet's presence seemed to aid concentration by providing something to be with and to touch.

Reading this description of children's physical arrangements around the TV set may prompt some critics to comment that this is the very anti-social behaviour of which television has been accused. On the contrary, the deliberate organisation by children of the little space that is left to them shows a keen sensitivity to their social and physical surroundings. Children were adept at manipulating their own environment to achieve their purpose of close involvement with the human drama on screen. This kind of TV viewing is anti-social only in the very narrow sense of annoying parents or not interacting with others face-to-face for a time. As the following section will demonstrate, it is unlikely that even the second charge can be applied to much of children's viewing.

SOCIAL INTERACTION DURING TELEVISION VIEWING

One of the devices of the 'nasty medium' argument is to assume that children's relationship with television is unique to the medium, that it is unlike other kinds of social behaviour. By contrast, even the early work of symbolic interactionists defined the relationship as akin to everyday social interaction but without the communication going both ways. In their early study of television hosts in game shows Horton and Wohl described the audience's relationship as 'intimacy at a distance' where television made available the kind of 'nuances of appearance and gesture to which ordinary social perception is attentive and to which interaction is cued' (Horton & Wohl, 1956:215)

Recent research and theoretical writing in this field has confirmed such a view. In their observation study of children watching TV, Reid and Frazer (1980a) describe instances of 'children playing with each other around the set as they viewed and even incorporating material from on screen into their talk and actions. Another study, based on similar research methods, demonstrates how children use TV content to initiate social events. In this particular study (Reid & Frazer, 1980b) children made comments and demands to those around them, including parents, based on the commercials they were watching at the time.

While this finding does not surprise anyone who has watched television with children, it belies the simple model of children's viewing being something apart from and different to everyday social behaviour. Fine and Kleinman make this general point about interaction with the mass media:

> 'popular culture products are created in group interaction, require group facilitation for their transmission and frequently are viewed by interacting groups...Thus, even a communication form seemingly removed from face to face interaction - the mass media - is grounded in the same set of basic interactional criteria' (Fine & Kleinman, 1980:12)

Designing a new study which would observe children watching TV at home provided the opportunity to analyse the different ways that children interacted with television and with each other as they viewed. Murray (1972) has described four different types of viewing behaviour, 'staring', 'commentary' (talk about programs), 'imitation' (copying actions from TV) and 'reproduction' (acting out a whole sequence from TV).

In the new study, eleven categories of interactions were derived from reading and summarizing over 200 hours of observations. These categories were given the name 'forms of interaction' and are listed in table 1.

The forms of interaction and their definitions were based on a method of constant comparison between the activity lists for each child. At first the categories were too general to reflect adequately the variation in behaviour between children and in different circumstances. As the analysis progressed, concepts were refined and revised so that they were sufficiently powerful to make those distinctions clear.

Two groupings have been created, 'expressive' forms of interaction, where television content is revealed in the child's behaviour and 'non-expressive' forms where their interaction with television is inferred from children's gestures and the regular association of behaviours with TV events. In each column, forms of interaction are listed in an order which shows children's attention to the TV screen. Parasocial interaction and intent viewing, for example, both involve very close and continuing attention to TV programs, whereas re-make usually takes place away from the set at another time.

Table 1. FORMS OF INTERACTION WHILE WATCHING TELEVISION

Expressive	Non-expressive
Parasocial Interaction	Intent Viewing
Performance	Systematic switching
Comment	Partial distraction
Discussion	Anticipation restlessness
Self-talk	
Monitoring	Monitoring
Re-make	

Four forms of interaction will not be discussed at length in this paper; systematic switching, partial distraction, anticipation restlessness and monitoring. In the last three, family events or leisure activities command children's attention as well as television. They therefore give it strategic notice in ways which have also been documented in laboratory studies (Bryant & Anderson, 1983). Systemic switching is a way of watching two or more programs during the same interval of time. These forms of interaction confirm the adroitness of children in negotiating their viewing alongside other distractions. However, other forms reveal more about children's social relationships as they view.

Parasocial interaction was identified by Horton and Wohl soon after the introduction of television as the 'simulacrum of conversational give and take' in which the viewer 'observes and participates in the show by turns' (Horton & Wohl, 1956:215). This participation may be in response to a person on the show or to other structural elements.

This kind of involvement with television did not mean that the child was 'glued' to the TV set and cut off from others. Most often it was a joint exercise with

another child, as in the following example where two children are watching 'Play School', an Australian preschool program.

(on the television screen a calendar appears with a blank space for the day)

Emma:Today is Friday, 10th December.

(Later in the program the presenter talks about ice blocks. 'That's hard and cold isn't it?')

Emma:We can't feel them!

(the presenter makes a nest with her hands)

Emma and her sister both make nests with their hands.

('Do you ever wear mittens when it is cold?')

Emma: Yes

Sister:Yes

The children continue to respond to the actions of the presenters, in turn rubbing hands, stamping feet and jumping up and down.

Performance is similar to parasocial interaction, but takes place at the same time as the TV events, not like a conversation. Advertisements, because they are so familiar to children and often contain jingles, are likely subjects for performance.

In some families, especially those who lived in close proximity and shared the one recreation space with the TV, children would 'perform' with the TV program, even if they were not sitting watching. Sometimes they were not even in the

TV room, and relied on aural cues for their performance.

The television is going at Judy's place but she is not watching, because she and her mother are busy getting things together to go away for the weekend. When an advertisement for soup is heard they each sing different parts:

Mother: Flavour, flavour, flavour.

Judy: Maggi, Maggi, Maggi...is it maggi or magic?

Mother: Maggi

Judy: (as she hugs her mother) I love you.

Parasocial interaction and performance were forms of interaction which showed most obviously children's enjoyment of particular programs. If another child or a responsive adult was present, this pleasure was usually shared.

Discussion and **self-talk,** by definition, involve person-to-person communication while viewing. What children saw on television prompted questions or extended talk to those who were viewing with them, and to parents if they were close by. In self-talk, children not only discussed television content, but also related it to their own experience.

Phillip sits at a table drawing and listening to the news on TV. One of the items describes a murder.

Phillip: There was a murder round here not long ago. I didn't know what happened and I looked over and they were filming it.

Even **comment,** a short pronouncement or 'aside' which children made as they viewed, often required an 'audience' in the shape of co-viewers. Two children in

the study made short comments to the cat or dog who watched with them.

In the following example, Peggy's initial comment is really part of an ongoing discussion with her mother about the events of 'Sons and Daughters', an Australian serial drama.

(on the screen a couple embrace)

Peggy: He doesn't love her. (she looks to her mother for confirmation)

(on the screen a car draws up to the house)

Peggy: Mum, would that be filmed at the house?

Mother: Sometimes filmed at the house, sometimes a studio set.

(the woman on TV decides to keep her child)

Peggy: Yeah! We won the bet!

Peggy and her mother continue discussing the program after it has finished and during the commercial until the beginning of the next program.

Interactions with programs and with co-viewers in which children use what is on TV in front of them demonstrate that viewing is 'social' in at least two ways. Firstly, children's ways of relating to TV are part of their everyday social behaviour. The children who displayed these forms of interaction in their viewing behaviour did not 'shift gears' and enter into the zombie-like trance described by some writers.

Secondly, television viewing was often part of the ongoing social relationships within families. Children made use of whoever was nearby; as joint participants, as a source of information or as a live audience for children's own comments.

There were two occasions when children were observed at play, using what they had previously seen on TV for their own enjoyment. This kind of interaction, which uses remembered television content has been called **re-make.** It is likely that play using TV is common between friends, but the location of the observation at home limited its occurrence in this study.

The most extended example was between Suzi, aged 8 , and her friend as they played in her bedroom one afternoon.

> For a few minutes Suzi and her friend listened to a music box which was in the shape of a small colour TV. Then they began to take turns speaking into a cassette recorder and playing it back. They pretended to read the news on TV, making it up as they went. 'Today Tasmania was destroyed but Russia is going to be chopped up to make lots of little Tasmanias' and 'Be careful, because some men are going around Sydney stealing knickers' Their play was punctuated by much giggling and sometimes they slipped into American accents.
>
> On the following afternoon, Suzi spent twenty minutes lying on her bed listening to the recording they had made.

Children's play using television may be 'social' in a more profound sense than those which have already been described. In their play, children have control over what they will choose, how they will perform and the kinds of comments they make in the process. Although there are indications in other areas of this research project (see Palmer, in press) that children prefer close imitation of TV events, their own repetition and rehearsal of TV content is a way of deciding with friends, what to learn from TV and how to regard it.

Suzi's spoof of the news is compatible with the finding that the majority of

children 8-9 years old hated news programs above all others (Palmer, in press).

There was one form of interaction which all but two children in the observation study engaged in. This has been named **intent viewing** to convey the level of concentrated attention. Intent viewing is part of the viewing behaviour of most children. 'Just watch TV' was the activity circled most frequently by children in the survey where 85% said that it was one of the ways they usually viewed. However, it was never the only viewing activity they circled.

Intent viewing has been called other names in research and in journalistic writing. 'Staring', 'passive gazing' and 'zombie-like trance' to name a few. By neglecting to observe the range of children's viewing behaviour, it has been easy to characterise the whole of children's viewing in this way.

Intent viewing is defined by close attention to the screen, a relaxed posture and very little bodily movement, except for slight movements of the hands and feet. Children often stroked animals, sucked pencils or played with small objects as they concentrated.

The period of time children spent watching intently varied greatly from child to child. Some would watch a whole program this way, with brief moments of distraction. Others could only sustain this attention for minutes at a time, usually in the most dramatic segments of a program.

It became very clear during the observations that children were deliberate about what they attended to closely. Intent viewing was never sustained for the duration of the commercial break and, for 11-12 year olds, the change in viewing behaviour when advertisements began was immediate.

Intent viewing was usually associated with the programs children liked best, as

was discovered at the end of observations when children provided the names of their favourite shows.

Len, aged 8, is an example of a child who sustained intent viewing for some time. Len's favourite program was 'Dr. Who'. He watched this program intently for ten minutes, was distracted during a long discussion of strategy between the characters, then watched intently again for ten minutes. During this time, he sucked his finger and moved to support his head on his hand. Len opened his eyes wider when the main characters were running from danger or engaged in fighting enemies. For the whole of the program, there were loud noises of children playing just outside the door which Len ignored. As soon as 'Dr. Who' was over he went outside to join them.

When children are closely observed watching television, the nuances in their behaviour become clear. Their attention to television is selective and deliberate. Even when they give a TV program their full attention, they respond in a variety of ways to the social dramas portrayed on the screen. If others are present, the response will probably be acknowledged or shared in some way.

It is possible that the children in this study were unusually astute in their management of their social environment and their responsiveness to social interaction on TV. There may be 'zombies' out there that have gone undetected. I am more inclined to think that it is an adult prejudice against the television medium that has produced the 'zombies' in our imagination. If it were not associated with television but with classroom teaching children's 'intent viewing' would probably be rewarded with praise.

THE SOCIAL CLASS NATURE OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING

What you win in discovering the meaning and complexity of children's

relationship with television, you lose in terms of the traditional demands of empirical work in this field. The detailed observation of twenty-three children does not establish the links between their interactive viewing behaviour and more conventional measures of social class and amount of viewing which have been the standard indicators.

In the original research design a survey had been planned to allow 'measurement' of any 'variables' which emerged as being important in the child/TV relationship. It also reflected the concern within symbolic interactionist writings that research about social process should not ignore the structural relationships established within a particular field.

One of the most consistent findings in surveys about children's television viewing has been the relationship between longer hours of viewing and lower socio-economic status. This relationship still holds good in Australia according to a 1982 survey of preschool children (Holman & Braithwaite, 1982). It was confirmed in the present study where the amount of TV viewing to 9pm was positively correlated ($r=.20$, $n=486$, $p<.001$) with low occupational status (the father's; many schools did not even record mother's occupation). However, as the authors quoted above observe, 'the identification of a class-viewing relationship does not necessarily advance our understanding of why some children watch more television than others' (Holman & Braithwaite, 1982:376) Nor does it address the different ways that children interact with TV at home.

The final stage of research therefore provided an opportunity to specify some of the relations between social class or amount of TV viewing and newly-developed measures of children's leisure and their activities while viewing.

The most important and novel of these was the Viewer Activity Index. Derived

from interviews and observations it used pictures to illustrate nineteen different activities around the TV set, for example 'eat a snack', 'read', 'jump and dance', 'do homework'. The illustrations were reminiscent of children's own drawings in their appeal and humour. Children were asked to circle the picture if it was something they usually did and to put a cross through it if it was something they did not do.The measure established for a representative group of children the variety and frequency of TV activities.

Two different measures of children's leisure activity were developed. The Home Recreation Measure also used pictures to describe the things children commonly did around the house and in their neighbourhood, such as 'go shopping', 'listen to the radio', 'play in the park'. For the second, the Structured Leisure Measure, children wrote down for every week day, the special things their parents payed for them to do.

The two leisure questions were quite distinctive in the groups of children they described. The measures were not correlated with each other ($r=-.02$, $p=.37$). They also bore an opposite relationship with socio-economic status. Children who engaged in a greater number of activities around the house and neighbourhood were those of lower socio-economic status ($r=.17$, $p<.001$). By contrast, these children wrote down far fewer structured leisure activities ($r=-.20$, $p<.001$).

Children who did most of their leisure around home were also those who watched longer hours of television. Even when the influence of socio-economic status is controlled for (by the use of partial correlation) this relationship holds good. It seems that the lack of provision of special activities which children do away from home is one significant factor in the amount of TV they watch. Of course, families with more money to spend on recreation and those who live in

areas where a range of facilities are usually available are at an advantage in providing alternatives to television for their children.

The picture of children's viewing revealed by the Viewer Activity Index would come as a surprise to those who still held ideas of children being passive as they viewed. It was found that the children who circled most activities were also those who watched longer hours of TV. ($r=.428$, $p<.000$). This result was based on a partial correlation where socio-economic level was taken into account. It seems that in homes where the television is on for long hours, children do many other things around it. They have adapted television to the performance of other tasks, just as they have adapted themselves to the presence of television. Television and the child's leisure activities occur together in the social life of the family.

CONCLUSION

With much of this information, people will want to argue about what is 'good' for children and what is 'bad'. For example, it is possibly a very useful social skill to learn to adapt to the constant presence of electronic media. What children 'lose' by doing so is open to debate. Certainly, the supposed virtue of severely limiting the amount of television children watch must be questioned.

Whatever practices adults adopt, they will need to be more aware of the dynamic relationship children have with television and its special significance to those children who have little access to other kinds of leisure. By acknowledging that children have a relationship with the programs they view, one which affords them much pleasure and which they like to share with others, greater significance is given to the content of the television programs themselves. It is these programs, different for different groups of children,

which are showing them social behaviour and its consequences.

The programs children see don't do justice to their viewing abilities or their curiosity about human relationships. We have been disgracefully slow in coming to terms with our own ambivalence about the television medium and as a result we have handed most of the initiative to define 'children's TV' to the commercial sphere. For those working in commercial television, the bottom line is the maximisation of audiences so that they can be sold as markets (Melody, 1973). Being suitably appalled at some of the programs which are shown to children on commercial TV is a good excuse to do nothing. It is encouraging to discover that children are so positive about their television viewing experience. We must give them programs which deserve their enthusiasm.

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